

THE NAVAJO MEDICINE MAN

CAN you imagine how it would seem when you are sick to have a big man come and sing over you all night and instead of feeling your pulse and looking at your tongue, make queer motions with sticks and feathers around your head?



A Navajo Hogan

If you were a Navajo Indian child, you would be given very little medicine, and instead of being tucked away cozily in a soft, warm bed

to rest and get well, you would have to lie on a buffalo robe or blanket thrown down on the dirt floor of a hogan. Then your friends would sit around on the floor beside you and join the medicine man in his strange, wild songs during the whole night or maybe for two or three nights. There would be no organ, no piano, no musical instrument of any kind but some old Indian would hold a dry gourd in his hand and shake it all the time, to make the seeds rattle and so keep time to the music.

Sometimes the medicine man would put a pinch of some kind of powder on your head and arms and feet, and once in a while give you something to drink from a little cup, and sometimes he has a lot of corncobs and waves them in the air one after another; or he waves sticks and eagle feathers trimmed with bits of bright yarn and little shells. At other times he holds a small tumble weed on the head and shoulders of one who is getting well and makes a strange sound with his lips—a sound that makes one think of the droning of a bagpipe.

The medicine men are not only the doctors but the religious teachers of the Indians as well. Sometimes their singing and ceremonies are for the sick and sometimes they are in honor of their gods, for the Navajos worship a great many strange gods.

One religious ceremony that few white

people ever see is the sand painting which is made on the floor of the hogan. The floor is swept very clean, then the medicine man sifts earth of different colors through his fingers and so makes a picture on the floor. The picture does not stay there long for the floor is soon swept again and the family life goes on as usual.

But in spite of the bad work of the medicine men, the Spirit of God is already at work in the hearts of the Navajos and their children. One of them has for three years sent his little son and daughter to the mission school. The boy was sweet tempered from the first but the girl was very cross and cruel and we thought that because of her brutal treatment of a little girl younger than herself, she would have to go home and stay. But during her third year of school, she has become sweet and lovable and without knowing it, is proving to all who know her what God can do in the heart of the child of a savage.

One day during a rainstorm we found shelter in the home of a medicine man. He was very kind and nice to us and did all he could to make our stay pleasant. After a while he took down from the wall a bundle of the queer things used in his ceremonies over the sick. He carefully untied the deerskin wrapper and showed us the sticks and eagle feathers

trimmed with small shells and bits of bright colored yarn. There was a sly twinkle in his eye and he afterwards told us that he knew his work would not cure the sick, but so long as other medicine men made money in that way, he would do so too. One day his little girl caught a bat and as he held it up by the wings he said "uzza" (medicine), so giving us to understand that he would use the wings in making medicine.

We told him of the Great Physician, of him who is "mighty to save," and after thinking over the matter and talking about it with his friends, he said that we must be right.

Shortly before his death, which occurred a few months later, he sent for the missionary to come to see him at his hogan. Who knows but that in his last hours this Navajo medicine man believed in the "Great Physician?"

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369—1st Ed.—5, 1907.

Price, 1 cent per copy; 75 cents per 100.